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THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Pamphlet No. 47

The Normality of Shakespeare
illustrated in his Treatment
of Love and Marriage

BY

C. H. HERFORD, LITT.D.

September, 1920

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THE NORMALITY OF SHAKESPEARE ILLUSTRATED IN HIS TREATMENT OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE¹

'NORMALITY' is a term which it may well seem the height of ineptitude to apply to a poet so profoundly original, so entirely *sui generis*, as Shakespeare. And certain senses of the word one dismisses as a matter of course from the outset. To enter the Shakespearian world is to see our life mirrored, if we will; but mirrored in a glass which reproduces what is ordinary and commonplace magically transformed into rare and ineffable beauty. Now that, so far, may be said of all poetic genius. The poet does transform reality, and opens the door into a magic world. But the transformation may be of different kinds. Reality may be all but effaced, as so often in Shelley, and the magic world be one into which we escape. Or, reality may be so all but completely retained when we have followed the poet, say Crabbe, through his open door, that the place he has taken us to is hardly distinguishable from the place we have left; somewhat as Jowett said of his friend F. D. Maurice's description of the Broad Church heaven, that it seemed to mean that to-morrow was going to be just like to-day, and the next world exactly like this. But suppose we find that the world which we enter by the open door, while completely transformed by a magic yet more wonderful than Shelley's, is, none the less, with all its rarity and strangeness, inexplicably familiar, and more crowded with recognizable reality, beyond comparison, than Crabbe's. This paradox, if such it be, is presented by Shakespeare more signally than by any other poet. What, then, exactly is the source of this impression of familiarity, of crowded reality, that Shakespeare gives? I suggest two related but distinct points. (1) The persons and plots of Shakespeare, however foreign to our experience, however *abnormal* in sense, are brought by the poetic speech in which they are conveyed, insistently and continuously, home to our experience. We have never known Hamlet, or a story in the least like his; but the play is proverbially full of 'quotations', i.e. of sayings which the world has seized on as felicitous ways of expressing what is always happening to us all. (2) But more than this—and I here approach the

¹ The greater part of this paper was originally published for the Shakespeare Tercentenary, 1916, in the Norwegian review *Edda*, to which the writer's acknowledgments for permission to reprint are hereby tendered.

point on which I propose to dwell to-day—while Shakespeare's persons and plots are in a sense foreign to us, they yet, when compared with those of almost any of his contemporaries, avoid eccentric, pathological, or fantastic types, and in this conform, as Marlowe or Webster, or even Jonson, do not, to the broad highway of experience. I would express this by saying that the Shakespearian world is impressed, as a whole, by an unmistakable *joy in healthy living*. That may perhaps seem as much a truism as his 'normality' seemed a paradox. But our loose talk of his 'universality' would imply that he handled life in all aspects without reserve; which is simply not the case. And I am suggesting that his joy in healthy living had the effect of keeping his mature art within the wide but definite limits beyond which lies the region of the pathological, the eccentric, and the fantastic, while within these limits is the region of what may in contrast properly be called the healthy or the normal.

I propose, in what follows, with your permission, to illustrate this in a single section only of the vast Shakespearian field: Shakespeare's handling of the love-relations between men and women. For here we have a well-defined matter, and one in which the characteristic I am dealing with can be set forth clearly within moderate limits of space.

It is possible to gather from Shakespeare what he thought to be the conditions of healthy love. It is possible, further, to show (1) that this Shakespearian *norm*, as I shall call it, of *love* prevails in his mature comedy and tragedy; (2) that he did not reach it at once, but after experiments represented especially in the comedies of his immature period; (3) that both in mature comedy and mature tragedy he occasionally admitted abnormal types and incidents *for specifically dramatic purposes*. I shall proceed to deal with these three points in succession.

I.

The Shakespearian *norm* of love,¹ thus understood, may be described somewhat as follows. Love is a passion, kindling heart, brain, and senses alike in natural and happy proportions; ardent but not sensual, tender but not sentimental, pure but not ascetic, moral but not puritanic, joyous but not frivolous, mirthful and witty but not cynical. His lovers look forward to marriage as a matter of course, and they neither anticipate its rights nor turn their affections elsewhere. They commonly love at first sight and once for all.

¹ The characteristics of this norm are well set forth by Wetz, *Shakespeare*, chap. v.

Love relations which do not contemplate marriage are rare and subordinate to other dramatic purposes. Tragedy like that of Gretchen does not attract him. Romeo's amour with Rosalind is a mere foil to his greater passion, Cassio's with Bianca merely a mesh in the network of Iago's intrigue. The course of love rarely runs smooth; but rival suitors proposed by parents are quietly resisted or merrily abused, never, even by the gentlest, accepted. Crude young girls like Hermia, delicate-minded women like Desdemona and Imogen, the rapturous Juliet and the homely Anne Page, the discreet Silvia and the naïve Miranda, are all at one on this point. And they all carry the day. [The dramatically powerful situations which arise from forced marriage—as when Ford's Penthea or Corneille's Chimène (*Le Cid*) is torn by the conflict between love and honour—lie, like this conflict in general, outside Shakespeare's chosen field. And with this security of possession goes a capacity for mirth and jest not usual in the dramatic representation of passion. Rosalind is more intimately Shakespearian than Juliet.

Married life, as Shakespeare habitually represents it, is the counterpart, *mutatis mutandis*, of his representation of unmarried lovers. His husbands and wives have less of youthful abandon, they rarely speak of love, and still more rarely with lyric ardour, or coruscations of poetic wit. But they are no less true. The immense field of dramatic motives based upon infringements of marriage, so fertile in the hands of his successors, and in most other schools of drama, did not attract Shakespeare, and he touched it only occasionally and for particular purposes. Heroines like Fletcher's Evadne (*A Maid's Tragedy*), who marries a nominal husband to screen her guilty relations with the King, or Webster's Vittoria Corombona (*The White Devil*), who conspires with her lover to murder her husband, or Chapman's Tamyra (*Bussy d'Ambois*), whose husband kills her lover in her chamber, are definitely un-Shakespearian.

The Shakespearian *norm* of love, thus understood, lent itself both to comic and to tragic situations, but only within somewhat narrow limits. The richness, depth, and constancy of the passion excluded a whole world of comic effects abundantly exploited both before and after him by others;—the comedy of the coquette and the prude, of affected love and worldly love, of the calf-lover and the doting husband, the comedy of clashing or subtly discordant ideals or temperaments in love. Here and there in this field Shakespeare made a brilliant incursion, but he never occupied it, and to large parts of it his art remained strange. We have only to recall, among

a crowd of other examples, Moreto's *Diana* (*El Desden con el Desden*), Molière's *Alceste* and *Célimène*, Congreve's *Millimant* (*The Way of the World*), Jonson's 'humorous' gallants, in Shakespeare's century,—or, in ours, a long line of figures from Jane Austen to Meredith and Ibsen's *Kjærlighedens Komædie*,—to recognize that Shakespeare, with all the beauty, wit, and charm of his work, touched, and could touch, only the fringes of the Comedy of love. If he did not view women with the shy chivalry which, in his portrayal of them so seriously limited the rich humour of Scott, he shows something of the same reluctance to make them the butts of ridicule. Moreover, his very conception of feminine character, exquisitely true and clear as it is, was too simple easily to admit the anomalies and inconsistencies from which the finer kind of comic situation arises. His women have in the highest degree the feminine accent, but they give little clue, in comparison with his men, to the qualities on which satire in all ages has fastened.

The normal love, not being itself ridiculous, could thus yield material for the comic spirit only in one of two ways,—by a comic situation, or by the wit and humour of the lovers themselves. Some of them, like *Rosalind* and *Beatrice*, virtually create and sustain the wit-fraught atmosphere of the play singlehanded. But Shakespeare habitually heightens this source of fun by some piquancy of situation, —almost always one arising from delusion, particularly through confusion of identity. It is a mark of the easy-going habits of his art in comedy that he never threw aside this rather elementary device, though subjecting it, no doubt, to successive refinements which become palpable enough when we pass from the *Two Gentlemen* to *Cymbeline*. But his genius made perennially delightful even those crude forms of confusion which create grotesque infatuations like those of *Titania*, *Malvolio*, *Phœbe*, *Olivia*. More refined, and yet more delightful, are the confusions which bring true and destined lovers together, like the arch make-believe courtship with which *Rosalind's* wit amuses and consoles her womanhood, and that other which liberates the natural congeniality of *Beatrice* and *Benedict* from their 'merry war'. In cases like these Shakespeare's humour has the richer and finer effluence which derives from a hidden ground of passion or tears. *Rosalind's* wit is that of a woman many fathoms deep in love; *Beatrice's* ears tingle with remorse at the tale of *Benedict's* secret attachment; *Viola's* gallant bravado to *Olivia* conceals her own unspoken maiden love. And *Portia* crowns her home-coming to her husband and her splendid service to his friend with the madcap jest of the rings. Such jesting is in Shakespeare

a part of the language of love ; and like its serious or lyrical speech, is addressed with predilection to love's object.

On the other hand, the delusion, instead of deftly entangling the lovers, may violently thrust them apart. The blindness of Claudio, of Othello, of Posthumus, of Leontes, shatters a unity of hearts, till then, so far as we see, complete, with consequences to the slandered maid or wife, and finally to the lover or husband, in varying degrees disastrous and pathetic. It is from this situation, most often, that Shakespeare evolves the tragedy of his ideal love, as from the happier, gayer kind of delusion its comedy. The situation clearly appealed strongly to him, and he made it his own. Even after leaving the stage, he was allured by the likeness of the story of Henry VIII's slandered queen to his Hermione to reopen the magic 'book' he had 'drowned'. We can hardly dissociate Shakespeare's repeated recurrence to it from the peculiar poignancy and delicacy of his portrayal of innocent, heart-stricken womanhood. He was no sentimentalist ; his pathos is never morbid ; but it is in imagining souls of texture fine and pure enough to be wrought upon to the most piteous extreme by slander from the man they love that Shakespeare found most of his loveliest yet most authentically Shakespearian characters of women ; Hermione and Hero, Desdemona and Imogen, are to his graver art what Rosalind and Beatrice and Portia are to his comedy.

In one drama only did he represent ideal love brought to a tragic doom without a hint of inner severance. The wedded unity of Romeo and Juliet is absolute from their first meeting to their last embrace ; it encounters only the blind onset of outer and irrelevant events ; nothing touches their rapturous faith in one another. This earliest of the authentic tragedies thus represents, in comparison with its successors, only an elementary order of tragic experience ; set beside *Othello* it appears to be not a tragedy of love but love's triumphal hymn. Yet it is only in this sense immature. If Shakespeare had not yet fathomed the depths of human misery, he understood completely the exaltation of passion, and *Romeo and Juliet*, though it gives few glimpses beyond the horizons of his early world, remains the consummate flower of his poetry of ideal love.

II.

Love in the Immature Comedies ('pre-normal').

The beauty and insight of Shakespeare's finest portrayals of the comedy and the tragedy of love were not reached at once. His conception of love itself was still, at the opening of his career, slight

and superficial; his mastery of technique was equally incomplete. The early plays accordingly abound with scenes and situations which from either cause or from both are not in the full sense Shakespearian. It will suffice in this sketch to specify two types of each.

The young Shakespeare, as is well known, showed a marked leaning to two apparently incongruous kinds of dramatic device—paradox and symmetry. In the riotous consciousness of power he loved to confront himself with the challenge of outrageous situations, to set himself dramaturgical problems, which he solves by compelling us to admit that the impossible might have happened in the way he shows. A shrew to be ‘tamed’ into a model wife. A widow following her murdered father’s coffin, to be wooed, there and then, and won, by his murderer. A girl of humble birth, in love with a young noble who scorns her, to set herself, notwithstanding, to win him, and to succeed. Paradoxical feats like these were foreign to the profound normality—under whatever romantic disguise—of Shakespeare’s mature art. Richard and Petruchio and Helen carry into the problems of love-making the enterprising audacity of the young Shakespeare in the problem of art. But the audacity of the young Shakespeare showed itself in another way. His so-called taste for ‘symmetry’ had nothing in common with the classical canons of balance and order. It was nearer akin to the boyish humour of mimicry. If he found a pair of indistinguishable twins producing amusing confusion in a Roman play, he capped them with a second pair, to produce confusion worse confounded in the English *Comedy of Errors*. And so with love. Navarre (in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*) and his three lords, like the four horses of an antique quadriga, go through the same adventure side by side. All four have forsworn the sight of women; all four fall in love, not promiscuously but in order of rank, with the French princess and her ladies, whose numbers, by good fortune, precisely go round.

But love itself is not, as yet, drawn with any power. Berowne’s magnificent account of its attributes and effects (iv. 3, mainly rewritten in 1597) is not borne out by any representation of it in the play. The ‘taffeta phrases’ and ‘silken terms precise’, the pointed sallies, and punning repartees, full of a hard crackling gaiety, neither express passion nor suggest, like the joyous quips of the later Rosalind, that passion is lurking behind. We are spectators of a rather protracted flirtation, a ‘way of love’ which was to occupy a minimal place in his later drama.

Kindred to this and equally immature is the representation of fickle love in the *Two Gentlemen*. Proteus is Shakespeare’s only essay in

Don Juan type, but it falls far short in psychological and dramatic force of his portrait of the faithful Julia. Proteus's speeches are often rhetorical analyses of his situation rather than dramatic expressions of it. His threat to outrage Silvia (v. iv. 58) is, as he naïvely declares, 'gainst the nature of love', and thus an isolated anomaly in Shakespeare's rendering of the passion. Even the apparent fickleness produced by delusion flourishes only in the magical world of the young Shakespeare's *Midsummer Dream*. No doubt Shakespeare's *dénouements*, even in some of the maturest comedies, show his lovers accepting with a singular facility a fate in love other than that they had chosen. Olivia accepts Sebastian in default of Viola, and the duke Viola when Olivia is out of the question. But these acquiescences, even if they were not touched with the frequent perfunctoriness of Shakespeare's finales, are not to be classed with deliberate inconstancy.

A second mark of unripeness in the conception of love is extravagant magnanimity. This, like other kinds of unnatural virtue, was a part of the heritage from mediaeval romance, fortified with Roman legend. The classical exaltation of friendship concurred with the Germanic absoluteness of faithful devotion, and for the mediaeval mind the most convincing way of attesting this was by the surrender of a mistress. In the tenth book of the *Decamerone* Boccaccio collects the most admired examples of 'things done generously and magnificently' chiefly in matters of love; one of them is the tale of Tito and Gisippo (*Dec.* x. 8), where, Tito having fallen in love with his friend's bride, Gisippo 'generously' resigns to him all but the name of husband. The story, quoted in Sir T. Elyot's *Governour* (1531), was well known in Elizabethan England, and fell in with the fantastical world of Fletcher's Romanticism. But the humanity and veracity of the mature Shakespeare rejected these extravagances, as the cognate genius of the mature Chaucer had done before him. Chaucer lived to mock at the legendary magnanimity of Griselda, so devoutly related in the *Clerke's Tale*; and it was only the young Shakespeare who could have let Valentine make his astounding offer, in the *Two Gentlemen*, to resign 'all his rights' in his bride to the 'friend' from whose offer of violence he has only a moment before rescued her (v. iv. 83).¹

¹ The conflict of friendship with love was in general treated in England with a livelier sense of the power of love than in Italy. Boccaccio's Palemone and Arcita, rivals for the hand of Emilia, courteously debate their claims (*Teseide*, v. 36, 39 f.); Chaucer makes them fight in grim earnest. Spenser, in the spirit of the Renaissance, makes Friendship an ideal virtue, but exposes it to more legitimate trials, as where the Squire of low degree repels the proffered favours of his friend's bride. (*F. Q.* iv. ix. 2.)

A second variety of extravagant magnanimity was the familiar situation of the girl, who, deserted by her lover, follows him in disguise, takes service as his page, and in that capacity is employed by him to further his suit to a new mistress. This motive was of the purest romantic lineage, having first won vogue in Europe through Montemayor's *Diana* (1558, trans. 1588), and in England by Sidney's *Arcadia* (1581, publ. 1590). On the London stage it profited by the special piquancy attaching to the rôles of girls in masculine disguise when the actors were boys, and its blend of audacious adventure and devoted self-sacrifice gave the Elizabethan auditor precisely the kind of composite thrill he loved.

For some forms of sex-confusion Shakespeare throughout his career retained an unmistakable liking. But the finer instincts of his ripening art gradually restricted its scope. Viola, in the original story (*Bandello*, ii. 36) follows a faithless lover; in *Twelfth Night*, wrecked on the Illyrian coast, she disguises herself merely for safety, takes service with the duke as a complete stranger, and only subsequently falls in love with him. The change indicates with precision Shakespeare's attitude at this date (c. 1600) to this type of situation. He was still quite ready to exploit the rather elementary comedy arising out of sex-confusion—to paint with gusto Viola's embarrassments as the object of Olivia's passion and Sir Andrew's challenge, or the brilliant pranks of Rosalind in a like position. But he would not now approach these situations by the romantic avenue of a love-sick woman's pursuit. In his latest plays he shows disrelish even for the delightful fun evolved from sex-confusion in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. The adventures of Imogen in disguise are purely pathetic. Pisanio indeed proposes, and Imogen agrees, to follow her husband to Italy in disguise; but this opening is significantly not followed up (*Cymb.* III. iv. 150 f.).

But in the *Two Gentlemen* the entire motive without curtailment or qualification is presented in the adventures of Julia. Abandoned by Proteus she follows him in disguise, takes service as his page, and is employed as go-between in his new courtship of Silvia. To the young Shakespeare the situation was still wholly congenial, and he availed himself of its opportunities of pathos without reserve though with incomplete power. His riper technique, fortified probably by a closer acquaintance with the spirited and highbred womanhood of the Portias and Rosalinds of his time, withdrew his interest, perhaps his belief, from the risky psychology of Julia's self-assertion and self-abnegation. Like other strained situations suggested by 'golden tongued romance', it fell away before the consolidated experience, the genial worldliness, the poetized normality, of his riper art.

III

Love outside the 'Norm': (a) in Comedy.

What I have called the ideal norm of love must thus rank high among the determining and creative forces of his drama. Obscured and disguised at the outset by crude conceptions and immature technique, it gradually grew clear, and provided the background of passion, faith, and truth out of which, aided by misunderstandings, pleasant or grave, his most delightful comedy and his most poignant tragedy were evolved. And other types of love, whether they made for comedy or for tragedy, held a relatively slight place in his work. But he uses them on occasion, as I have finally to show, when *some independent dramatic purpose demands*.

His comedy of love, outside the norm, for the most part approaches burlesque. Shakespearian burlesque indeed, penetrated with poetry, human nature and good humour, but still provoking the loud laugh more often than the 'slim feasting smile'. It is crudest where, as in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', the players are to be laughed at as well as the piece; or where, as in the play in *Hamlet*, an unreal type of love is deliberately intended. Akin to this is the merry parody of the artifices of literary Pastoral in the despair of Silvius and Phoebe (*As You Like It*)—a picture not much truer to actual love-making than the wit combats of *Love's Labour's Lost*, but differing from this as does the master's parody from the disciple's amused, but admiring, imitation. The altercations of Oberon and Titania have a like literary root in the romance of faery; but they are touched also, for Shakespeare, with the poetry of folklore, and the satire upon 'humans' remains only as a delicate thread in a lovely imaginative creation. In Bottom and Titania human grossness and fairy fantasticality are brought together for the eternal joy of gods and men.

The play in which the Shakespearian parody of love more especially runs riot is *Twelfth Night*. It bears many traces of the influence of Jonson's Humour Comedy. Viola's maiden passion alone is reverently and tenderly touched. Even the shrewd and discreet Olivia, who wins our respect by her dignified attitude to the duke's importunity, is herself caught by a 'most extracting frenzy' and does not escape the suspicion of ridicule which belongs to those who blunder in love. The duke is a subtly humorous study of a 'way of love' very unlike that of Shakespeare's ideal lovers—the self-pleasing luxury of an artist in emotion and a child in will, who feeds his passion on music, and does his wooing by attorney. The duke and his vain courtship are taken in outline from the original story. Shakespeare's

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brilliant humour has enriched this gallery of futile love-making with two other immortal figures—Malvolio courting his lady with smiles and yellow stockings, and Sir Andrew, who gets no further than learning an assortment of fine words for an interview that never comes off—a comic counterpart to Iago's miserable dupe, Roderigo.

The *Merry Wives* also shows the influence of the Humour Comedy. Slender is a true 'country-gull', nowhere more obviously than in his wooing, or preparations to woo, sweet Anne Page. The adventures of Falstaff in pursuit of Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page are brilliantly executed examples of a kind of comic effect which Shakespeare's riper art habitually disdained. The queen, according to accepted tradition, had commanded him to represent 'Falstaff in love'. He responded by this good-humoured wholesome inversion of the Italian novel of intrigue, where the knightly lover has as little to do with love as he has with the true and genuine Falstaff of Eastcheap.

IV

(b) *In Tragedy*

Finally, as Shakespeare recognized for purposes of comedy certain types of love-making alien to the ideal norm, so too, more rarely, for the purposes of tragedy. Ideal love, as has been seen, occurs constantly in the tragedies even where it does not directly affect or participate in the tragic issues; as with France and Cordelia, Brutus and Portia, Richard II and his queen, Coriolanus and Virgilia. It may even subtly contribute, like the innocent boldness of Desdemona, to draw closer the entangling threads; but the more penetrating sense of evil which becomes apparent in his tragic period contributed to draw into the sphere of his art more prominently the disastrous aspects of the relations between men and women. That he refrained from exploiting in drama the more sinister forms of love we have seen; but in some of his ripest and greatest work he resorted to types clearly marked off from the norm—now by frail instability, now by lawless violence—and not merely admitting a tragic issue imposed from without, but directly breeding and evolving it from within.

Love, like everything else which grows in Hamlet's Denmark, is touched with insidious disease. Ophelia is wonderfully imagined in keeping with the tragic atmosphere, an exquisite but fragile flower of the unweeded garden where evil things run to seed and good things wither. And her love, wholly un-Shakespearian as it is, and therefore

irritating to many readers, bears within it the seed of tragedy both for Hamlet and herself. It is 'a power girt round with weakness'. She never falters in faithful devotion to him; but the 'sweet bells', her father has told her, are 'jangled', and she consents both to be the instrument of the king and Polonius's 'lawful espial' (which may, please heaven, restore him), and to deny Hamlet access and return his gifts. She stands alone among Shakespearian heroines in renouncing her love at a father's bidding. We seem to approach for once the heroic renunciations of love in the name of principle or country which impress us in Corneille and Racine—in *Polyeucte* and *Bérénice*. But no halo of sublime self-sacrifice surrounds Ophelia's renunciation, for her or for us. It is merely a piteous surrender, which breaks her heart, overthrows her delicately poised reason, and removes one of the last supports of Hamlet's trust in goodness.

On the other hand, Shakespeare occasionally found his tragic love in violent and lawless passion. We need not dwell on episodic incidents like the rivalry in the love of Edmund which crowns and closes the criminal careers of Goneril and Regan. In this case there was little scope for the undoing of soul which is the habitual theme of Shakespearian tragedy. But in *Measure for Measure* an inrush of sensual passion instantly shatters the imposing but loosely built edifice of Angelo's morality, and though the play was meant for comedy, and the tragic point is thus (rather clumsily) blunted or broken off, the spiritual undoing of him is discernible enough. Without a thought of resistance he proceeds to act out the whole merciless catalogue of vices which the poet of the 129th sonnet saw attending upon lust.¹ At the same time it is clear that Isabel, with her cold austerity, is an even greater anomaly among Shakespeare's women. Their purity is not that of a negative abstinence, but of whole-hearted devotion to the man they love.

In *Cressida* he drew a kind of tragic love as lawless as Angelo's and as sensual, but insidious and seductive instead of violent. Compared with the profligate women of Restoration Comedy she has a certain girlish air of grace and innocence. If she betrays Troilus for Diomedes it is with a sigh and a half-wistful glance back] at the deserted lover :

Troilus farewell! one eye yet looks on thee (v. ii. 107).

Though classed by the Folio editors—hesitatingly it would seem—with the Tragedies, this play seems to set at naught the whole scheme of Shakespearian tragedy. Neither Troilus nor *Cressida* has the grandeur without which ruin is not sublime; and their love has not

¹ 'perjured, murderous, . . . savage, extreme . . . rude, cruel, not to trust.'

the heroic intensity of those (like Heine's 'Asra') *welche sterben wenn sie lieben*. The only imposing figures are those of the great captains of the Greek and Trojan camps, who are but slightly concerned with their love. Nevertheless the whole effect of the play is tragic, or falls short of tragedy only because the gloom is more unrelieved. There are no colossal disasters, plots, crimes, or suffering, nor yet the stormy splendour which agony beats out of the souls of Othello, Hamlet, Antony or Lear, and which leaves us at the close rather exultant than depressed. This tragedy is purely depressing because it strikes less deep; the harms do not rend and shatter, but secretly undermine and insidiously frustrate. Cressida is the symbol of the love which may kindle valour for a moment but in the end saps heroism and romance at once, and which strikes the magnificent champions of Homeric story themselves with a futility more tragic than death, the futility hinted savagely in the Horatian *Troiani cunnus teterrima belli causa*, and superbly in Faustus's great apologue to 'the face that launched the thousand ships'.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, on the other hand, a type of love not in its origin loftier or purer than that of Troilus and Cressida is seen dominating two souls of magnificent compass and daemonic force. Antony is held by his serpent of old Nile in the grip of a passion which insolently tramples on moral and institutional bonds, private and public alike; which brings them to ruin and to death; and which yet invests their fall with a splendour beside which the triumph of their conqueror appears cold and mean. There is no conflict, no weighing of love and empire, as great alternatives, against each other in the manner of Corneille; nor does Shakespeare take sides with either; he neither reprobates Antony, like Plutarch, for sacrificing duty to love, nor glorifies him, like the author of the Restoration drama, *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*; still less does he seek to strike a balance between these views. He is no ethical theorist trying exactly to measure right or wrong, but a great poet whose comprehensive soul had room, together, for many kinds of excellence incompatible in the experience of ordinary men. That Antony's passion for Cleopatra not only ruins his colossal power in the state but saps his mental and moral strength is made as mercilessly clear in Shakespeare as in Plutarch. He is 'the noble ruin of her magic'. But it is equally clear that this passion enlarges and enriches his emotional life; in a sense other than that intended by the sober Enobarbus,

A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart (III. xiii. 198)

and enlarged feeling opens up new regions of imagination and lifts him to unapproached heights of poetry, as in the unarming-scene with Eros (iv. 14) and the farewell speeches to Cleopatra ('I am dying, Egypt, dying', iv. 15). And Cleopatra too, in the 'infinite variety' of her moods, has moments of self-forgetting devotion of which she was before incapable. Moments only, it is true; the egoist, the actress, the coquette, are only fitfully overcome; in her dying speech itself the accent of them all is heard. The baser elements are not expelled, but the nobler 'fire and air', to which she dreams that she is resolved, triumph for an instant in her cry, 'Husband, I come'. Love is for Shakespeare a spirit so pervasive and manifold—

With the swift motion of all elements
 Coursing as swift as thought in every power—

that even its most tragic and ruinous passion may touch the spring of self-forgetful devotion.

Shakespeare's poetry takes account of so vast a number of other things, of so many other ways of living and aspects of life, that we hardly think even of the author of *Romeo and Juliet* as in any special sense the poet of Love. Nor is he, if we mean by that that he thinks or speaks of Love in the transcendent way of Dante, or Lucretius, or Spenser, or Shelley. Love with them is part of the vital frame of the Universe. Lucretius (in spite of his atomist creed) saw it pervading 'all that moves below the gliding stars, the sea and its ships, the earth and its flocks and flowers'. Dante saw it as the force which not only draws men and women together, but 'moves the Sun and the other stars'. Spenser saw it as 'the Lord of all the world by right, that rules all creatures by his powerful saw'. Shelley saw it as the sustaining force 'blindly woven through the web of Beings'. For such heights of poetic metaphysic we do not look in Shakespeare. He is one of the greatest of poets, yet his poetry is woven of no tissue of myth and dream; its staple is the humanity we know, its basis the ground we tread; what we call the prose world, far from being excluded, is genially taken in, and more alive than ever. And Shakespeare's most thrilling and splendid utterance about Love—'Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove'—only expresses with lyric entrain the ideal of love relations between men and women which we have seen to dominate his drama, and which illustrates the lofty Normality I have ascribed to his art.

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